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ABSTRACT

This paper examines the historical development of Women's Studies as an academic discipline. Principles of this education include a feminist perspective and an interdisciplinary approach. Students assume the responsibility for their own learning. Varied resource people are used in the classroom. The object of this feminist model is to define the role of the instructor as resource person and synthesizer of materials. The feminist model encourages cooperation among members of a learning community, values clarification, an interdependent and collective learning experience, and integration of experiential learning with theoretical learning. Methods for attaining these goals are discussed, as well as grading and research. (MA)

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A NEW REVISIONIST SCHOLARSHIP: THE DEVELOPMENT OF WOMEN'S STUDIES IN THE UNITED STATES

Though revisionist scholarship, particularly in the historical profession (See Wise, 1973), has gained more credence (with traditional scholars) in the last ten years, the conflict between the ideological assumptions of "value-free" inquiry and "advocacy" scholarship (the scholarship of social change), is still real. The tradition of disinterest in academic investigation has a long history, coming to the United States from the German universities in the nineteenth century, which has given the notion of "objectivity" not only credence and legitimacy, but has developed a "gospel" within which revisionist scholarship is seen as a heresy.

Yet, revisionist scholarship has an historical evolution of its own. Seen in the context of Thomas Kuhn's paradigmatic analysis of scientific revolutions (1962), revisionist scholarship has moved through the phase Kuhn labels the discovery of anomolies and on to the phase of offering itself as a new "normal science" (pp. 35-42, 52-65). Revisionist scholarship in the United States grew out of a sense that traditional, disinterested scholarship simply did not have adequate explanations to account for all the phenomena of the post-modern world. Social change movements of the fifties

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and sixties--particularly the civil rights movement and the peace movement--varified the perceptions of young scholars that there were large gaps in the way research was being conducted, and strong, though perhaps unconscious, biases in the supposedly disinterested scholarship which resulted from such research. Though a traditional Marxist perspective had had a number of adherents in the U.S. as far back as the late ninteenth century (Rossi, 1973, pp. 473-477, 506-516), revisionists scholars often saw that perspective as narrow (Firestone, 1970, pp. 105-190). With it as a theoretical base, a jumping off point, they moved on to ask new questions, particularly in the social sciences, and to posit new answers to human problems. Revisionist scholarship is, thus, activist. It provides a theoretical framework and a quantitative data base for use by advocates of social change. In that, it is far from disinterested as it seeks answers to the question of what it means to be human.

Within this context, women's studies as an academic discipline found the soil for its own growth. Feminist scholars would assert, however, that the early revisionists wore the same blinders traditional scholars wore: though they asked new questions, those questions were still bounded by the world view of white males (McNaron et. al., 1973, p. 1 and Yates, 1975b, pp. 1-2). Using a Kuhnian model, however consciously, feminist scholars

posited the anomolies of early revisionist scholarship, and offered their own perspective as the new "normal science" (Yates, 1975a, p. 211).

Still, the paradigmatic development was similar. As revisionist scholarship in general had grown out of activist assertions of the need for social change, so women's studies grew out of the feminist movement's theoretical critique of American social institutions. Women's Studies provided the movement with a forum for rigorous documentation of that critique. It also began to develop the quantitative data base necessary to give credibility to the feminist world view.

Addressing the problem such an ideological base creates for scholars who would posit new questions within a feminist context, Adrienne Rich, a feminist scholar and poet, has asserted that traditionally ". . .[e]ach woman in the university is defined by her relationship to the men in power. . ." (1975, p. 32). She advocates women's studies as a scholarly discipline because it offers a ". . .focus for feminist values. . .in a patriarchal context" (p. 32). In that sense, women's studies is a heresy with potential far beyond revisionist scholarship.

Women's studies is revisionist in that it seeks to determine the reality of women's lives historically, rather than relying upon cultural myths about

the nature of women as a grounding for theoretical assertions. In determining the reality and variety of women's experience as part of American culture, feminist scholars have had to diffuse the power of accepted sex-role stereotypes both of and about women. Women's Studies is also revisionist in that it alters the criteria for determination of what is worth scholarly attention. It is revisionist, finally, in that it proposes radical restructuring of pedagogical techniques and radical reassessment of curriculum materials.

The concept of women's studies as a discipline was developed primarily by students who led activist lives in the late sixties and early seventies. They had already discovered through participation in the civil rights movement and the peace movement that the revolution which was being made meant little to them. They still made coffee, licked postage, typed, and ran the duplicating equipment. Somehow, as Robin Morgan has pointed out, there ain't a lot of difference between cooking brown rice and cooking Betty Crocker (1970, p. 185). Once they dealt with the reality of their position, they decided to get something for themselves. They recognized not only their degredation in political terms, but in sexual terms. Once they had been expected to be virginal. Now they were expected to "put out." In either case, the choice was not theirs.

Their identification with other oppressed peoples led them to begin to frame a feminist analysis of American culture. In the beginning it was crude. It suffered from an anti-intellectualism which had grown from the general new left suspicion of established institutions. But it was a start. As the critique developed, young women who sat in classrooms began to understand that they, because they were women, were excluded from the conduct of public life within all the American institutions which are studied in the traditional college curriculum. They were excluded, except for token recognition, from the life of the University itself (McNaron, et. al., 1973, pp. 1-2). In an attempt to both fill the gaps left by traditional scholarship, and to get the university to respond to their current needs, young women all over the country pressed for the inclusion of women within the curriculum (Howe, 1977, p. 15).

The history of women in higher education in the United States had provided a model for these young feminists' demands. One of the earliest women's issues in that country, an issue articulated sometime before one could say there even was a feminist movement, had been the expansion of access to educational institutions for women. Frances Wright saw this need as early as 1820; Harriet Martineau championed it; Margaret Fuller denounced its lack; and the women who met at Seneca Falls in what has come to be called

the first women's rights convention made it part of their platform (Rossi, 1973, pp. 86-182, 417). Even Catherine Beecher, who believed in maintaining and strengthening the traditional roles of women, held that the education of women was imperative as they had moral responsibility for teaching the young (Kraditor, 1968, pp. 82-86). The women who renewed the vigor of the nineteenth century demand had a long and strong history upon which to draw. The only problem was that that history had been obscured, their access to it blocked, which was precisely their point.

As these young women made their demands, women a little older, some already at least on the fringes of academic careers, began to see their position in a new light as well. These women had been trained in the traditional modes of scholarship, had followed the rules--as females learn early to do--and had found barriers to their achievement as well: ". . . graduate students locked out of grants by anti-female quotas, or suffering motivation crises as they struggle for the Ph.D.; and finally, bewildered women academics who, having mastered the hurdles (some like Naomi Weisstein in psychology at Harvard) with highest honors, are unable to get good jobs" (Tobias, 1970b, p. 1). Women such as these had little to lose in demanding a place for women within the curriculum.

It was from these women that the concept of a separate discipline, one intirely devoted to the study of women, one independent of traditional departments, was almost lovingly developed. The first course in the United States was an interdisciplinary, team-taught course titled "Female Personality" offered at Cornell University in 1970. That course was organized after a conference on women had been held and after a faculty seminar had been concluded (Tobias, 1970a, pp. 2-4, 1970b, pp. 1, 3). The first program was founeded at California State University at San Diego in 1970 (Boxer, 1978, pp. 20-23 and Deckard, 1975, pp. 366-367). By the time Florence Howe, professor at SUNY-Old Westbuy, and Frances Kelley did a study of programs at the end of 1976, their numbers had grown to 276, many of them with majors leading to the baccalaureate, at least one offering a graduate minor (Howe and Kelley, 1977, p. 17). Over 15,000 courses were taught by 8,500 faculty members at 1,500 different institutions by the end of 1976 (Howe, 1977, p. 15).

Though women's studies was first organized on college and university campuses, it was not long before courses evolved in both elementary and secondary schools. Even vocational and technical institutes, traditionally strongholds of sex-stereotyped educational programs, have begun to address women's needs (Minneapolis Area Vocational-Technical Institute, 1978, p. 2).

Within higher education, which is, of course, what I know best, and which has been responsible for most of the theoretical development of feminist learning concepts, the seriousness with which scholars approach both learning and teaching women's studies is reflected not only in those phenomenal growth statistics, but in the nature of women's studies itself. As an academic discipline, women's studies calls for a systematic restructuring of the entire process of learning, a complete focusing, a totally new way of approaching the questions which test the limits of human knowledge. The creation of this new paradigm, this new world view, involves the development of a concept of feminist education, a concept which first acts as an antithesis to the thesis of traditional learning theory and methodology, and seeks from that to create synthesis.

The first principle of that education is a feminist perspective. A feminist perspective is pro-woman. It:

> investigates human experience from the points of view of women; seeks to focus on women's activity, women's works, women's past, women's culture, women's groups and women in groups, women's experiences and women's materials in the belief that this focus will rectify the academic neglect of women in many areas; seeks new knowledge and new interpretation of the feminine and of female lives and works; pursues the goal of academic attention being paid to women to the same level to which it is paid to men (Yates, 1978a. p. 1).

The context of women's studies is first dependent upon such a perspective. The second principle of feminist education is that it is interdisciplinary. Feminist scholars have found that, similarly to culture studies and ethnic studies, the methods of traditional academic disciplines are each inadequate in making a thorough analysis of women's lives. An interdisciplinary methodology allows students and faculty to use methods from a number of disciplines to render than analysis whole. The arts can be used as cultural documents in addition to works of the imagination; historical methods can be used to develop pictures of the lives of ordinary women within the traditional context of historical events; the techniques of anthropology can be employed to study the effects of social change on the values and behavior of women in a variety of cultural settings; measurement psychology can help to create new tools from which new norms will develop; sociological analysis can evaluate women's roles in feminist groups. Taken singly, the results reveal only part of women's lives. Together, the results create a rich and colorful montage which has a depth and complexity otherwise lost. Though some individual courses within any given women's studies curriculum may adopt a single disciplinary stance, applying to it a feminist perspective, very few courses totally

limit their focus to one methodology. Many courses may be cross-disciplinary, using methods of comparison and contrast as the focus. Others may be multi-disciplinary, using several methods discretely. The goal, however, is the achievement of an interdisciplinary perspective, if not in a given course, at least within the whole curriculum.

The process through which feminist learning is achieved is also different from the process of traditional learning in the United States. The traditional model of scholarship, teaching, and learning, because it believes itself to be disinterested, has an unarticulated value system. Though that value system remains unacknowledged, it seeks, nevertheless, to socialize students into particular modes of thought and into particular kinds of behavior. That model's tacitness is its danger: the hidden values are not examined. Such a model is dependent upon students to learn passively, to learn not to raise uncomfortable questions for which the traditional paradigm has no answers. It depends upon those who use and learn the model not to discover its anomolies, or, if they do discover them, not to acknowledge that discovery. The feminist model, drawing some of its characteristics from educational experiments of the 1960's, concretely articulates its methodologies, admits and exploits the bias of the feminist perspective.

Its socialization process is intentional, a process deliberately modeled by feminist teachers and scholars. Working in this model, students become "responsible for their own learning," as Etta Martin, a former colleague at the University of Minnesota, has declared. This model also asserts the value of varied resource people within the classroom. The role of the instructor is demystified. Ellen McVeigh, another former colleague, put it this way to one of her classes: ". . .I reject the notion that there is a specific body of information to be delivered by the teachers to the students in this course. I see my function. . .as a resource person and, equally with the class, as a synthesizer of the material we read" (1976, p.1). Any member of the class who has a particular expertise is, thus, encouraged to assume the role of teacher. This includes the designated instructor, the teaching assistants, the students themselves. When there are gaps, outside resource people are admitted to the circle in a fashion that integrates them in a way that the role of guest lecturer does not. Openness and flexibility are important characteristics of this model. In an attempt to achieve the model's objectives, I call my course syllabi "working papers." Together with the students, I attempt to flesh them out by recognizing the special needs and expertises within each class.

The traditional model of learning differs from the feminist in several other ways. It encourages competition among students which results in their closing themselves off from other students. There is little sharing of insights or information. Students learn not to share knowledge, and further, they learn the present/attack method of developing ideas. This is particularly true of graduate students, but as the aspirations of undergraduates are found to be further and further out of line with what they can realistically expect, it becomes true of them as well. The contrasting characteristic of the feminist learning model is cooperation among members of a learning community. Documentation and refinement of ideas is rigorous, but the process is non-judgmental. Imagination and creativity are encouraged, and students often learn more from ideas which they find they cannot work through than from projects which are easily developed and completed.

The traditional model which holds value free inquiry and the disinterestedness of academic pursuits as its goals not only avoids clarifying its own values, it lacks a richness gained from the examination of the whole concept of values. The feminist model gains not only from the demystification of its own value system, it gains from the discussion of backgrounds and biases of other value systems. It articulates the possible influences on

value change or lack of change. It develops more complex explanations for human behavior within richer contexts. It also raises disturbing, often unanswerable, questions.

Another feature of the traditional model, one which overlaps with the features I have already outlined, is the concept of the individual, self-sufficient, self-reliant, autonomous learner. (The language is Professor David Noble's.) That concept is perpetuated through adherence to the values of conformity, competition, and value-free inquiry. The feminist model posits an interdependent and collective learning experience. Yet that model does not advocate collectivity at the expense of people playing leadership roles. It merely says that many learners can play such roles at different times.

Finally, and, perhaps, most damaging, the traditional model isolates learning from living, compartmentalizing both bodies and minds, resulting in fragmented learning, at worst, learning in a vacuum. The feminist model integrates experiential learning with theoretical learning, striving for wholeness, for a sense that everything somehow relates. Initially, the feminist movement itself ". . .challenged fundamentally the dichotomies which have been set up traditionally between one's professional and one's

personal concerns, between rational responses and emotional responses. . ." Movement theoreticians asserted that "'the personal is the political,' that people must integrate the separate compartments of their lives." Women's Studies and a feminist perspective have applied that theory to "learning by structuring courses which call upon students [and faculty] to integrate their personal and academic 'selves' and to function holistically. Women involved in the process learn to understand the materials of the courses, women, that is, themselves, better" (McVeigh, 1976b, p. 1). As Etta Martin put it:

> The most important element in Women's Studies, in my view, is the development of a feminist perspective. For me that means a holistic approach. Some feminists have described it as circular thinking as opposed to linear thinking. It is a Gestalt. It is concerned with inter-relationships and connections between ideas and emotions. It does not necessarily demand concise and clear answers but instead poses complex contradictions and exciting possibilities for study (1976, p. 1).

The very language of Martin's statement reflects that integration: she is a psychotherapist who applies the principles of her discipline to the concept of feminist pedagogy. As she points out, such a method of learning seeks to make us whole. All of these assumptions of the feminist model are designed to stretch both student and teacher ability to think and to ask questions in new ways.

Many of the methods which are used to implement the ideal of feminist learning are not new. A lot of them come, as well, from the experimentation of the 1960's. Yet they differ from the methods of other experimental models in that they are informed with the spirit of a feminist perspective. One way of achieving the interdisciplinary goal of feminist learning is to have courses team taught or collectively taught by scholars from various disciplines. That method has been employed from the very beginning (Tobias, 1970a, p. 4). At Minnesota, the introductory sequence--the most consciously interdisciplinary sequence within the curriculum--has been taught by a team of an anthropologist, a political scientist, and a literary critic; by a team of a psychotherapist and an Americanist; and by a team of an Americanist and a specialist in speech/communication.

A second method which is particularly useful in helping students to synthesize the material and to develop their own feminist perspectives is the use of small discussion groups which meet once or twice each week to discuss the materials of the course. At Minnesota, these groups are led by advanced undergraduates who are majors in the program. Though this model was originally developed as a response to a tight budget, it has proven to be one of the most valuable elements in the women's studies curriculum.

The group leaders gain training in the skills and techniques of small group facilitation, in addition to learning material more thoroughly because they are expected to teach it. The students see feminist values modeled not only by the course instructors, but by older, more experienced peers.

The groups are structured around discussion questions which expand the course materials of the larger class sessions, but the groups also provide a support system for young women who are being confronted with anxiety producing content. Most of these groups become rapidly cohesive and often meet outside of what is expected in terms of the course. They attend art exhibits, movies, plays and concerts together, study for the final examination together, help each other--often working jointly--on their course projects. The spirit of the groups often includes elements of consciousness raising (that is almost unavoidable in a women's studies course), though enough structure is imposed, and enough training is given the teaching assistants who lead the groups, to prevent its taking over the groups' focus. Occasionally, such groups continue to meet as support groups after the courses are completed. Though very little research is yet available which measures the effects such groups have on students, what has been done measures the effects such groups have on students, what has been done indicates the need for such

groups, not only to help the students digest the course materials, but since those materials are so personally touching, to provide a forum where those personal concerns may have attention (Guzell, 1977, p. 322).

The actual content of class session tends to be more varied in women's studies than in the traditional curriculum partly as a result of the concept of everyone in the class being a "resource." Student presentations are frequent--plays, panel discussions, data collection, and guest experts; slides, films, and music are used as expressions of cultural values. The idea of varied resource people extends beyond the classroom itself. Students have been mentors for other students' projects; teaching assistants with specific interests have conducted additional informational sessions and skills development sessions. For example, the last time I taught the introductory sequence, the teaching assistants did a panel discussion on the development of women's studies as a discipline; a student organized a panel designed to address various life-style issues, using class members as discussants; the assistant director of the Student Legal Services office on the campus, an attorney, spent a session discussing women and the law, met with the teaching assistants and me to guide us in organizing further discussion, and mentored several student projects; one teaching assistant

gave an additional information session on the artist, Mary Casatt (we had little time for in depth work in the arts); one student group did market research analysis; another dramatized the planning meetings for Seneca Falls--complete with period costumes; another teaching assistant gave skills sessions in journal writing; and, finally the teaching assistants collectively wrote a handbook for teaching assistants in women's studies--all this in addition to the regular work of the course.

The work which students are expected to produce to secure grades in women's studies varies, of course, but it is usually much more highly individualized than it is in a traditional curriculum leading to the baccalaureate. In the introductory sequence at Minnesota, which is representative, students are asked to produce work in three general areas: work which has significance to them personally; work which reflects their ability to synthesize the reading material and the material of the class sessions; and work which is somehow integrated with both their academic and career goals. Within these guidelines, <u>what</u> they produce is up to them (though the medium is arrived at in consultation with instructors and teaching assistants). This allows a great deal of flexibility and it allows students to make use of individual skills in ways which are not usually

considered appropriate in college classrooms. Students have written biographies; they have made films and videotapes; projects have come from every imaginative medium. One of the best methods of pushing students to integrate the materials of the course with their own personal experience is to have them keep journals or logs recording their attitude changes, their value conflicts, their anxiety, as well as their new knowledge. Another technique is to have them write their own final examinations: good questions are often more difficult to write than good answers.

Grading is probably the area which creates the most difficulty for both students and teachers of women's studies. Personalizing the material of a curriculum comes to mean that students' values, often their very being, are on the line. One way of coping with this sensitive issue is to go back to the conscious articulation criterion of feminist education itself. Grading criteria are explicit and written. Copies are distributed to the students. Teaching assistants as well as instructors grade each piece of work. (In traditional curriculums almost all grading, particularly in lower division courses, is done by teaching assistants.) Feed back is developmental.

What all these features add up to is much more of a commitment to

learning and teaching--an emotional as well as an intellectual commitment--for both students and faculty. Women's studies cannot be done at all, let alone well, without that commitment. But the objectives seem worth it. Though specific objectives differ from course to course, the objectives of the introductory sequence cover all the areas as a beginning.

Those objectives are: to examine women's studies as a discipline; to survey historical and contemporary women's issues within a context of social change; to provide an environment where, even though classes may be large, students and faculty may frequently interact through class discussion and in small groups; to give students the opportunity to gain an academic perspective on women's issues and to rigorously apply it, emphasizing the interdisciplinary research methodology modeled in class lectures; to have students produce sustained, in-depth projects which have personal value as well as fulfilling course requirements; and to encourage analysis of course materials and the contemporary environment toward an understanding of the personal and institutional impact of women's issues and the women's movement. More generally, the goals are to develop autonomy within community, to encourage students to make informed choices using critical skills and judgments, and to help them to articulate their needs

and their own personal goals within the context of a classroom.

The goals are comprehensive, the objectives almost cosmic, but the growth and development of the concept of women's studies indicates that the value systems of many within academic environments are undergoing a radical restructuring, a paradigm shift, as Kuhn would say (pp. 110-134). In all areas of education the shift is evident. In the elementary and secondary levels projects such as the Emma Willard Task Force on Sexism in Education and Project Born Free (See Hanson, 1977) have developed a data base from which to work on reducing sex-role stereotyping in the schools in every area from counseling to text books. Many colleges and universities are convincing traditional departments to add women to their curricula and texts. And more women's studies programs are granting baccalaureate degrees and developing graduate majors. Women's studies even has its own national disciplinary association, with regional sub-units.

What research has been done on women's studies, its development, its growth, and its impact on students, has demonstrated that as an academic discipline it has tremendous potential. Its impact on all who participate is much greater than the impact of traditional curricula (Talburtt, et. al., 1977, pp. 1-34; and Guzell, 1977, pp. 312-320). Yet, it is not without its

problems, most of which are a result of the times in which American higher education finds itself. Declining enrollments and declining budgets put all academic disciplines in tenuous positions, threaten the future of higher education itself. Obviously, these difficulties would be reflected by women's studies. Yet, partly because it is new, partly because it seeks to be interdisciplinary, and, partly because its focus is women, it feels the pinch more strongly: where others may get a red mark on the skin, women's studies sustains a bruise; where others get bruises, women's studies has welts; where others have welts, women's studies skin is broken.

Women's studies programs have always had small budgets to begin with, and at best those budgets have not been increased at all--in the face of several years of double digit inflation. Though it is easy to see the positions of deans who allocate budgets, it is difficult to understand why women's studies, one of the few fields in which enrollments have either sustained themselves or grown, should bear the burden of declining enrollments in other liberal arts disciplines. Perhaps there are other explanations. Interdisciplinary studies, particularly in liberal arts, are losing credibility in general. The belief is that they do not translate into jobs, and even if they do, they are still not really serious academic endeavors.

it is a time of pulling back, of digging in, of trying to save "the core." And, whatever women's studies is, it is not the core. It is an old story: the last hired, the first fired. Such budget problems create governance problems--illusory autonomy, and staffing problems, which ultimately will affect the quality of women's studies curricula. Programs will only be able to offer what will "sell," instead of creating a coherent, structured curriculum (Howe, et. al., 1978, pp 1-23).

Women's studies programs also have complex problems in terms of ultimate goals. Should their goal be such complete curricular integration that they work themselves out of business? Or should they strive to maintain themselves independently and visibly, and risk isolation from the mainstream of the academic community? Such questions are not easily answered. They create continual tension. Nevertheless, the spirit which led to the creation of women's studies in the first place, the energy which motivated the women--and men--who have given so much of themselves already, is still strong. It will somehow guarantee its own survival. It will somehow nourish its own growth. The paradigm shift has begun, and things will never be the same. As Gayle Graham Yates, coordinator of the Women's Studies Program at the University of Minnesota, said in her keynote speech

to the founding meeting of the Great Lakes Women's Studies Association:

> [Women's studies] is an intellectual revolution. . . It is the realization of women's intellectual power. It defies the assumptions and the authority of male-centered knowledge and education. It is feminist, political, educational, and personal. Women's studies is going strong, and it is not going away (1978b, p.15)

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